RUSSIAN WEAPONIZATION OF INFORMATION AND INFLUENCE IN THE
BALTIC STATES

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ABSTRACT

RUSSIAN WEAPONIZATION OF INFORMATION AND INFLUENCE IN THE
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ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Virus
AMWG	Active Measures Working Group
AOWG	Asymmetric Operations Working Group
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EAP	Election Action of Poles
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FSB	Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)
MFA	Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
USIA	United States Information Agency
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> While each country should be considered on its own merits, we believe that the integration of each democracy will be a success for us all and the integration of each democracy will be a success for Europe and NATO.
> — Vilnius Group Motto

> I believe Putin is a man of Russia's past, haunted by lost empire, lost glory, and lost power. Putin potentially can serve as president until 2024. As long as he remains in that office, I believe Russia's internal problems will not be addressed. Russia's neighbors will continue to be subject to bullying from Moscow, and while the tensions and threats of the Cold War period will not return, opportunities for Russian cooperation with the United States and Europe will be limited.
> — Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*

Background

Infektion

Throughout the 1980s, rumors first emerged and then spread that the Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus, commonly referred to as HIV, and the cause of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS, was a product of US germ warfare scientists. The rumor appeared to originate in the Indian press in 1983, republished by the Soviet Journal *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and given additional credence by Jakob Segal, an East German biology professor and Soviet-bloc citizen. Segal made these allegations in print and on television, ignoring collegial pressure to avoid making unsubstantiated allegations. These rumors then travelled to Africa, published in August 1986, conveniently timed to coincide with the Eighth Summit of Non-Aligned Nations occurring in Zaire at the same time. Evidence unearthed in the Bulgarian State Security

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Archives since the end of the Cold War clearly indicates that the Soviet Committee for State Security, the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (KGB), coordinated multiple activities as part of Operation *Infektion,* a disinformation campaign whose stated objective was to discredit the US in the international arena.[1]

Infektion stands as a prominent example of disinformation that persists to this day; even though the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbechev disavowed the AIDS propaganda campaign, some actors continued to publicize the story, including Segal until his death in 1995.[2] The conspiracy publicized in 2014 that the Centers for Disease Control created Ebola to depopulate Africa is a familiar theme to those that remember the *Infektion* story, as it harmed US interests and influenced those predisposed to believe in nefarious motivations by Western institutions.[3] Such disinformation was only one method utilized by the USSR under the broad doctrine of "Active Measures," which is a Soviet-era term used to describe information, psychological, or political means conducted to advance Soviet foreign policy goals and extend influence throughout the world. Besides covert media placement, other examples included forgery, pro-peace societies, and agents of influence in targeted societies. While the end of Cold War heralded a new age of peace and cooperation among the liberal democratic West and the former communist nations in Eastern Europe, these means of

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[1] Erhard Geissler, "The Aids Myth at 30," *International Journal of Virology and AIDS* 3, no. 1 (March 2016): 1.

[2] Ibid., 2.

[3] Alan Feuer, "The Ebola Conspiracy," *New York Times*, October 19, 2014, accessed March 21, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/19/sunday-review/the-ebola-conspiracy-theories.html?_r=0.

influence are again a troubling trend for Western nations. The Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, simultaneously new members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and former members of the USSR, pose a particular quandary for the US and the NATO alliance due to their strategic value and vulnerability to a revanchist Russia and the mutual defense obligations imposed by Article 5 of the NATO Charter.

The Baltic States and NATO

Upon the accession of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to NATO in March of 2004, the alliance took on the responsibility of providing for the mutual defense of former Soviet Socialist Republics. Previous accessions to NATO since the disintegration of the USSR included former Warsaw Pact nations[4] but treading on the ground of the former Soviet Union itself carried implicit costs for NATO, and particularly for the US, in relations with Moscow.

The history of the Baltic States' inclusion in the Russian, and then Soviet sphere never fit the same mold of other Eastern European nations. Culturally, the Baltics identified with Central and Western Europe. Germanic and Nordic cultures integrated the Baltic States in the 12th and 13th centuries, and Lithuania was part of Poland until the 18th century. Peter the Great would assimilate these countries into the Russian empire in the 18th century, but the people remained largely Lutheran (in Estonia and Latvia) and

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[4] NATO Accessed the Visegrád Group, comprised of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Poland in 1999; for more detail on this dynamic see Chapter 6 in Nikolas K. Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy-Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (Los Angeles, CA: CQ Press, 2014).

Catholic (in Lithuania), while Moscow, a distinctly Eastern culture with historical and religious ties to Byzantium, remained under the auspices of the Orthodox Church. Along with Finland, the Baltics retained their own culture; they were not Slavic, their languages used Roman letters, not Cyrillic, and they maintained their own distinct literatures and traditions. Following the collapse of the Romanov dynasty in 1917, the Baltic States enjoyed 20 years of autonomous self-rule, ending in 1939 as a result of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement between Nazi Germany and the USSR. While the West never recognized their annexation, the *de facto* status of Eastern Europe as the Soviet Sphere during the Cold War prevented anything besides rhetoric from the West to influence their status.[5]

As momentum built and the USSR's dissolution accelerated at the end of the Cold War, nationalist movements within each of the Baltic States gathered support. Preceding the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989, 2 million citizens of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined hands from Tallinn to Vilnius to demonstrate regional solidarity. After some Soviet resistance to independence, including an embargo against Lithuania in 1989 and military intervention in January of 1991, the USSR recognized the independence of all three Baltic States in September of 1991. The three nations immediately began to petition for integration into Western institutions as a bulwark against future aggression from the East.[6]

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[5] James S. Corum, *The Security Concerns of the Baltic States as NATO Allies* (Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College, 2013), 8-10.

[6] Gvosdev and Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 212-213.

Baltic lobbying for membership in NATO continued throughout the 1990s, causing consternation in Moscow as they observed the security buffer against the West shrink to Russia's pre-World War II borders. Russia's desire for security at their borders is rooted in their history going back to their imperial days. From the 16th century to the beginning of the First World War, Russia subsumed territory roughly equivalent to the Netherlands every year. Mongol aggression from the East combined with Western expansion under Roman Catholic and Protestant banners created a cultural and political paranoia requiring buffers on all sides, manifesting in the USSR's insistence at the end of the Second World War of a buffer of Soviet Republics and satellite states ruled by the whims of Moscow.[7] After the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, internal turmoil and a dramatic decline in military might under President Boris Yeltsin undercut the levers of influence required to keep the Eastern bloc together. Western leaders failed to understand or disregarded the importance of how this dynamic damaged the Russian institutional psyche, which might manifest itself anew when Russia found its economic and nationalist bearings under new leadership.

Evolution of Relations between Moscow and US: Post Yeltsin

Relations between the East and West had deteriorated since shortly after Vladimir Putin became acting President of Russia following Yeltsin's resignation on New Year's Eve in 1999, and Putin's subsequent electoral victory in March of 2000.[8] President

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[7] Andrew C. Kuchins, "Why Russia Is so Russian," *Current History* (October 2009): 318-322.

[8] Michael Wines, "Election in Russia: The Overview; Putin Wins Russia Vote in First Round, but His Majority Is Less Than Expected," *New York Times*, March 3, 2000,

George W. Bush determined to improve relations with Russia and its new leader, going

so far as to claim he had a "sense of his soul" after meeting with Putin in Slovakia in June

of 2001. This optimism quickly deteriorated in the face of cultural and political

differences, such as press freedom, Russian democratic reforms, and Russian support for

Iran during nuclear negotiations.[9] NATO's expansion into the former Soviet sphere in

2004, though nominally accepted by Putin at the time, appears in hindsight to have

provided impetus for Russia to reassert its power. Shortly after Bush signaled support for

the admission of Georgia and Ukraine to NATO in 2008, Russian rhetoric compared the

United States to Nazi Germany, a powerful association to Russians with historic

memories of their Great Patriotic War.[10] After Putin ceded the presidency to his

handpicked successor, Dmitri Medvedev, tensions between Georgia and Russia boiled

over, and Russia responded to Georgian shelling of the breakaway republic, South

Ossetia, by invading their far smaller neighbor in the southern Caucuses during the

Russo-Georgian War. This aggression irrevocably soured the relationship between the

Bush White House and Moscow that began with optimism seven years earlier.[11]

President Barak Obama entered office in 2009 promising to reset relations with

Russia, but the next eight years, both with President Medvedev until 2012, and then again

accessed March 22, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/27/world/election-russia-overview-putin-wins-russia-vote-first-round-but-his-majority.html.

[9] Peter Baker, "The Seduction of George W. Bush," *Foreign Policy*, November 6, 2013, accessed March 25, 2017, https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/11/06/the-seduction-of-george-w-bush/.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

with President Putin when he won a non-consecutive, and thus constitutional, third term, saw a precipitous downturn in relations. Putin personally denounced what he perceived as the US facilitating the murder of Libyan dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011. Later that year, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made public statements supporting protesters in Moscow alleging voter fraud in the December 2011 parliamentary elections. Kremlin leaders interpreted the protests and Clinton's comments as proof that the protests were US sponsored events meant to foment unrest within Russia and topple the regime. Russia answered subsequent US sanctions against Russia for human rights abuses with a ban on US adoptions of Russian children. Geopolitically, the Russian government viewed the popular uprisings characterized as the Arab Spring and Color Revolutions as evidence of aggressive Western propagation of liberal democratic values, and as a mounting threat to Russian prestige and power within their Eurasian sphere.[12] When Russia granted asylum to rogue National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden in 2013, Obama canceled a state visit to Moscow.[13] Relations suffered even more dramatically when tensions exploded between Russia and Ukraine in 2014.

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[12] Asymmetric Operations Working Group (AOWG), *Ambiguous Threats and External Influences in the Baltic States and Poland: Phase 2* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2015), 12-13.

[13] Mikhail Zygar, "The Russian Reset That Never Was," *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2016, accessed March 20, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/12/09/the-russian-reset-that-never-was-putin-obama-medvedev-libya-mikhail-zygar-all-the-kremlin-men/amp/.

Crimea: Changing the Security Paradigm in the Baltics

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 further intensified tensions between

Russia and the West, but also changed the dynamic in Eastern Europe. This escalation

was due to the Russia's increased reliance on information rather than conventional

means. Instead of overwhelming military force, Russia employed indirect influence and

manipulation to break the will of Ukrainian forces to resist, which resulted in their

surrendering all military bases in the region in less than three weeks.[14] NATO and

especially the former Soviet republics in the Baltics observed the framework of Russian

information warfare with a wary eye, concerned it might foreshadow Russian intentions

for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as well. Sophisticated combinations of espionage,

cyber-attacks, and manipulation of isolated populations created conditions for Russian

special operations forces to seize key infrastructure virtually unopposed. After the *fait

accompli*, Kremlin-controlled media, both traditional and online, flooded the information

environment with pro-Russian, anti-Ukrainian narratives, shaping conditions to enable

their post-conflict control.[15]

Tension between Russian revanchism against liberal democratic expansion and

NATO's mutual defense guarantees pose a security challenge for NATO and the Baltic

States. The capitals of Estonia and Latvia, Tallinn and Riga, are each less than 210 km

from the Russian border. Lithuania is sandwiched between Belarus, a Russian ally, and

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[14] Nick Sinclair, "Old Generation Warfare: The Evolution-Not Revolution-Of the Russian Way of War," *Military Review* 96, no. 3 (May/June 2016): 11.

[15] Azhar Unwala and Shaheen Ghori, "Brandishing the Cybered Bear: Information War and the Russia-Ukraine Conflict," *Military Cyber Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2015): 4-7.

Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast, strategically located to interdict access to the region from the Baltic Sea or the land route through Poland. The three nations are relatively small, and their terrain open and flat, providing no space to trade for time or significant advantage for defending forces. Demographically, the three nations combined are not even one-tenth as populous as Russia, and their combined armed forces only equal about a single brigade. If Russia chose to intervene militarily in any of the Baltic States under the pretext of protecting ethnic Russian populations, their invasion would be virtually unopposed and could rupture NATO, undoing almost seven decades of stability and international cooperation in Europe.[16]

<p style="text-align:center">Problem Statement</p>

Russian soft power and information warfare, as demonstrated in Crimea in 2014, pose significant threats to the integrity of NATO. The Baltic States present a unique vulnerability due to their geographic proximity to Russia and their significant Russian minorities that provide Russian influence a vector into Baltic societies. Russian media, disinformation, propaganda, political manipulation, infiltration of Russian language education, and organization of ethnic Russians through formal and informal foreign policy structures may destabilize the Baltic States to the point that Russia can justify military intervention on the pretext of protecting ethnic Russian minorities. This would present NATO with a strategic dilemma that leaves NATO and the US with no favorable outcome.

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[16] Stuart J. Kaufman, *NATO, Russia, and the Baltic States* (Washington, DC: Program on New Approaches to Russian Security, 2002), 2.

Authoritarian regimes, such as Putin's Russia, possess inherent advantages when conducting propaganda or disinformation campaigns, as they exercise more control over the flow and content of domestic media, and thus are able to protect their own domestic stability with little to no regard for liberal democratic norms. Western democracies are not able to exert such control. Western privately owned media companies react to market pressures by publishing low-cost content of dubious quality, and their citizens are largely free to communicate disinformation that conforms to their biases.

Importance of the Study

US military planners, interagency partners, and the NATO coalition need to reorient Western approaches to Russian strategic information warfare. The purpose of this research is to identify vulnerabilities to Soviet-style active measures and political warfare that have been hallmarks for Putin's revanchist Russian foreign policy since 2000. Soviet foreign policy generally fell into one of three categories. "White" operations were overt public diplomacy and trade. "Black" operations were covert subversive efforts that included kidnapping, assassination, and blackmail. The "Gray" zone of operations included unattributed radio broadcasts, hoaxes published by third parties, and ostensibly independent organizations in fact operating as Soviet fronts.[17] The current iteration of gray zone operations in the former Soviet sphere indicate a willingness to blend military and nonmilitary influence to justify hostilities or renegotiate the world order to give

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[17] Steve Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin's Russia," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, 15, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 4

Russia a more prominent role in world affairs while undermining Western institutions, primarily NATO.

The Baltic States represent NATO's most exposed military vulnerability.[18] Besides Russian geographic and military advantages, their actions in the former Soviet sphere indicate increasing willingness to exploit demographic and historical conditions to gain advantage in the information and political dimensions, ultimately enabling military consolidation. Understanding these ways and means is necessary to develop policy solutions for the region, deter Russian aggression, and maintain Western European and Atlantic institutions.

<center>Assumptions</center>

The following assumptions allow analysis from both the Russian and NATO perspective in regards to the political, military, and information environment in the Baltic States, both as members of NATO and former client states in the Soviet sphere of influence.

The first assumption is that all three nations remain enthusiastic members of the alliance, and do not voluntarily choose a policy akin to "Finlandization;" that is, choosing to subordinate their national foreign policy interests to their larger, more powerful neighbor, in this case Russia, in exchange for not meddling in the smaller state's internal

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[18] David A. Shlapak, *Reinforcing Deterrence On NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 3.

matters.[19] The history of Imperial Russian and then Soviet occupation, and the hundreds of thousands of Baltic citizens deported to the eastern Russian frontier make it unlikely that any of the Baltic States would voluntarily leave a cohesive NATO for security guarantees made by Russia.

The second assumption is that Russia's current paradigm of hybrid warfare has roots in Soviet active measures. This assumption allows analysis to draw on lessons learned during the tenure of the Active Measures Working Group (AMWG) and the United States Information Agency (USIA), two Cold War institutions that played an important role in US strategy to combat Soviet nonmilitary aggression. The US government dissolved the AMWG in 1992 after the end of the Cold War. The USIA continued until the 1998 *Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act* abolished the agency in 1999 while reorganizing its broadcast and public diplomacy functions throughout the government.

The final assumption is that Russia will not go forward with military action unless they achieve similar success shaping the information environment as they did in Crimea, thus obviating any value in disinformation or manipulation.

<u>Thesis Overview</u>

The primary research question asks, "What strategic options exist for the US, NATO, and the Baltic States to respond to Russian soft power incursions of propaganda,

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[19] Richard Milne, "'Finlandisation' Makes a Polarising Comeback in Finland," *Financial Times*, September 2014, accessed February 12, 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/cbb17c76-435c-11e4-be3f-00144feabdc0.

disinformation, and information warfare in pursuit of their strategic objectives in the Baltic States?"

In order to answer the primary question, this research frames the first, and most important, subsidiary research question as determining Russian interests and actions by determining what Russia sees as its own strategic objectives. This includes defining how Russia views its own role in the world, and how Russia views NATO's expansion into the former Soviet sphere.

Next, in order to analyze how Russia uses information, one must also understand how Russian doctrine indicates that propaganda, disinformation, and information warfare complement their conventional and unconventional forces, and how Russia supports these efforts with formal and informal foreign policy structures.

After defining Russia's global interests and mechanisms of influence, one must consider how this relates to the Baltic States, how Russia defines its strategic interests in the region, and the ways that Russia weaponizes information and influence in each country using complementary means. Subordinate to identifying the means of influence are identifying persistent themes, and the audiences targeted by Russia in their influence operations in the Baltics. Understanding the relationships between Russia's ends, ways, and means will ultimately lead to answering the primary research question posed above.

<u>Limitations and Delimitations</u>

The primary limitation in conducting this research is classification. All of the research conducted for this thesis is open source, and thus unclassified, and all of the resulting analysis is unclassified. This paper does not consider current planning efforts in any military headquarters or interagency forum.

The primary delimitation of this research is that it will only focus on information means as a tool of influence, and will only tangentially consider economic or military means. Second, the research only considers the Baltic States due to the shared cultural and historical experiences of the region, and the unique vulnerabilities the region poses to the NATO alliance. Lastly, this research will only analyze secondary sources, and will not generate new data.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The organization of this chapter corresponds to the subsidiary research questions organized by sequence and topic, with the way that each source contributed to understanding the topic and answering the question. First, this process consisted of a broad overview of background information and evolving relationships between the US and NATO, the Baltics, the USSR prior to collapse, and Russia after the Cold War ended. The first of these topics covers the legacy of Soviet active measures and an overview of the US approach in the closing days of the Cold War. Next, the research addresses the evolution of the relationship between the Baltic States and NATO, and how that dynamic fit into the overall relationship between Moscow and the US after Yeltsin resigned at the end of 1999. To set the stage for the current diplomatic and information environment, the introduction ends by examining the paradigm shift that occurred in all of these relationships when Russia annexed Crimea and signaled a shift in Moscow's approach to world order. Next, the literature focuses on Russian global and strategic interests. This includes Russian views of its own role in a multipolar world, how Russia perceives NATO expansion, and how Russian culture accounts for the legacy of the Soviet-era and its dominion over Eastern Europe and the Baltics. The next section analyzes the ways of Russian information warfare, including how Russian doctrine indicates the ways propaganda, disinformation, and information warfare, support foreign policy objectives and conventional warfare means. The next subject considered addresses specific Russian ends, ways, and means in the Baltics. This includes Russian strategic objectives in the region, and then discussion of the sources that contributed to understanding each

individual country of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This closes with analysis concerning

target audiences and persistent themes identified during research. The last section

addresses sources that provided answers to the primary research question, describing

strategic options available to the US, NATO, and the Baltic States that counter Russian

propaganda, disinformation, and information warfare in the region.

The story of *Infektion,* a KGB disinformation campaign to discredit the US among

target audiences in the West and non-aligned nations in Africa, set the stage for this

thesis. Erhard Geissler's article in the *International Journal of Virology and AIDS* titled

"The AIDS myth at 30," chronicled the origins of the story that the US created AIDS and

how the story spread around the world, persisting even after Soviet authorities disavowed

the conspiracy. Alan Feurer's "The Ebola Conspiracy" published in *The New York Times*

provides an example of how the themes of Western conspiracies to depopulate Africa

remain in the information sphere even decades after the Cold War ended.

Having linked Cold War disinformation with contemporary foreign policy issues,

the research next considers NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe and the historical

record of the USSR in the region. Three writings in particular provided the necessary

reference points for this description. James Corum, a former dean of the Baltic Defence

College in Tartu, Estonia, provides a thorough overview of the Soviet-era in the Baltics in

The Security Concerns of the Baltic States, a monograph provided by the Strategic

Studies Institute. The book *Russian Foreign Policy – Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* by

Nikolas Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh provided broad context for Russian relations

among Eastern European leaders and the sequence of NATO accession among Eastern

European nations in the former Soviet sphere. Their writings also assisted discovery of

other sources through its citations, including concepts such as religious diplomacy, the Compatriots' Policy, and the role that NGOs play in Russian foreign policy structures. One of these sources was Stuart Kauffman's *NATO, Russia, and the Baltic States*, published by the Program on New Approaches to Russian Security, in which the author described contemporary Western criticism against NATO accession of the Baltics. Criticisms included the precarious military situation in the event of Russian invasion and the negative perceptions among Russian policy makers if NATO expanded into former Soviet republics. Alicja Curanović's book, *The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy*, provided a detailed description of Russian religious diplomacy. Historical continuity regarding security sensitivities from Imperial Russia to the Putin regime were the subject of Andrew Kuchin's journal article "Why Russia is So Russian," published in *Current History* in October 2009.

Relations between the US and Moscow are captured in a number of newspaper and magazine articles. Michael Wines wrote "Election in Russia: The Overview," for *The New York Times* in March of 2000 summarizing the conditions and initial expectations the West held upon Putin's election. Western observers hailed his victory as likely to continue economic and democratic reforms that began under Yeltsin, and were initially thankful that the Communist Party, once thought to carry an electoral edge, did not return to power. Peter Baker's "The Seduction of George W. Bush" and Mikhail Zygar's "The Russian Reset that Never Was," both published in *Foreign Policy* in November 2013 and December 2016, respectively, captured the mood that evolved between US and Russian administrations through 16 years of frustrating relations. In short, the United States believed Putin's Russia embodied a junior partner, perhaps in an apprenticeship role, to

promote market reforms and democracy under US leadership. The two sides never saw the issue of human rights the same way, leading to an initial hardening of attitudes that grew progressively worse through two American presidential administrations. These attitudes hardened and festered as US policy relied on miscalculations of Russian sentiment towards NATO expansion and unilateral Western operations in the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa. US relations with Russia under Bush irrevocably soured during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, but Obama entered office determined to reset the relationship. This imperative wilted on the Russian side upon Qaddafi's murder in 2011, which fed the Russian belief that ostensible democracy movements, such as the Arab Spring and "Color Revolutions," were Western orchestrated initiatives aimed at changing the regime in Russia.

"Brandishing the Cybered Bear," written by Azhar Unwala and Shaheen Gori, and published in the journal *Military Cyber Affairs,* provided a summary of ways and means used by Russia to enable Crimea's annexation in 2014. The operation was novel in that Ukrainian forces surrendered their bases and withdrew without conflict due to Russian manipulation of media, politics, and social mobilization, and caused a radical shift in the Baltic and NATO security environment. Nick Sinclair captured the sentiment of this shift in "Old Generation Warfare: The Evolution, not Revolution, of the Russian Way of War," published in *Military Review* in 2016.

Several sources provided context for Russian information warfare doctrine, and the links between Soviet-era Active Measures and its modern Russian equivalent. Steve Abrams' "Beyond Propaganda, Soviet Active Measures in Putin's Russia," published in *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* presented several pertinent case studies, along with

the Reagan Administration's comprehensive approach outlined in National Security Decision Directive 75. The Russian MFA "Foreign Policy Concept" gave a sterile policy description of these objectives, including the Compatriots' Policy, which Russia consistently uses as a pretext for foreign interventions.

Though this project did not aim to consider economics as a topic, the impact of Eurasian economic imperatives did require some research and description. The International Crisis Group's report on "Eurasian Economic Union: Power, Politics, and Trade," provided a history of the union and its relative regional influence. Putin's own words at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 provided a window into how Russia viewed multipolar power structures and economic influence, distinct from the unipolar world in which the West exercised near hegemonic prerogatives in both the economic and military domains. Emerging Russian information warfare doctrine, examined by Charles K. Bartles in "Getting Gerasimov Right," and published in *Military Review* provided summary analysis of what Western observers should take away from Crimea's annexation, allowing further analysis to apply against Russian influence.

Tools of Destabilization, a product of the Swedish Defence Research Agency in 2014, and edited by Mike Winnerstig, provided a comprehensive analysis of Russian covert and overt influence initiatives in the Baltic States. Internal academics and professionals wrote each of the individual chapters considering the individual circumstances in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania from approximately 2008 to 2013. Winnerstig's introduction and executive summary provided a broad overview of objectives, primarily destabilization to fracture Western institutions, and each of the individual chapters provided useful insights, both for the region, and the individual

nations. Their work included traditional soft power influence through cultural exchange, and the Russian application of soft power that includes political and economic interference, and the particularly nefarious Russian brand of propaganda presented as legitimate news media. By combining diplomatic and cultural policies that encourage Russian language education and social networking, ethnic Russian communities remain isolated and underserved, and thus reliant on Russian media for information. This cycle of information and influence provided the crux for analysis and recommendations to address Russian influence. The Asymmetric Operations Working Group's (AOWG) "Ambiguous Threats and External Influences" report from 2015 provided additional insight from a military perspective regarding Russian strategy in the region.

Putin's rhetorical evolution regarding NATO expansion into the former Soviet sphere moved from agnostic, as captured by Marko-Mihkelson's account of a Putin press conference in 2001 when he appeared to tacitly approve of NATO expansion into Eastern Europe, to hostility captured in a post by Bruce Jackson titled "A Turning Point for Europe's East," on *www.hoover.org*. A Congressional Research Service report written by Jim Nichol in 2014 titled "Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests," tracked the changing rhetoric and action throughout the Bush and Obama administrations. The military threat posed by Russia received consideration by the AOWG and a paper written by Jeffrey Rathke, "Can NATO Deter Russia in View of Conventional Military Imbalances in the East?*"* Māris Andžāns' journal article "Patching the Shield," published in *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* provided additional data about the potential overmatch of Russian forces in the Baltic region, with almost 250,000 Russian service members across the border.

Joseph Nye's description of soft power provided an initial consideration of Russian application of soft power, described in detail by Gundrun Persson's chapter on Moscow in *Tools of Destabilization.* Subsequent descriptions of how Russia uses its Compatriots' Policy, both as an objective and means of influence to communicate its distinct view of the Soviet-era and perception of support for fascism in modern Western institutions, served as a framework to examine each country later in research. The administration of compatriots' organizations through NGOs, nonetheless affiliated with the Kremlin, also provide avenues to fund education and political organizations that further increase rifts in Baltic societies. The Hague Center for Strategic Studies published "Beyond the Cold War of Words," augmenting information provided by the Swedish Defence Research Agency in *Tools of Destabilization* to aid understanding of the region.

Several publication provided information about media avenues utilized by the Kremlin, including "The Russian 'Firehose of Falsehood' Propaganda Model" written by Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews and published by the RAND Arroyo Center and "Winning the Information War" written by Edward Lucas and Peter Pomeranzev for the Center on European Policy Analysis. These sources primarily focused on Western outlets, such as RIA Novosti, Sputnik, and RT, but provided a useful frame to consider Kremlin-owned media in the Baltics. Lucas and Pomeranzev also captured detailed case studies in both Estonia and Latvia that provided examples of how Russia manipulates history, technology, and target audiences to produce violent results and political action. Also from RAND, Andrew Radin's "Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics," described dynamics among ethnic Russian minorities targeted by Russia for mobilization and influence.

Tools of Destabilization provided most of the information for each of the sections describing Russian influence in the individual nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, diagramming the relationship between Russian ways and the various means, including religious diplomacy, media manipulation, social mobilization, and support for Russian language institutions. Additionally, Leila Roos' accounts captured in "Pawns and Paranoia: Baltic American Anxiety over Russian Aggression," published in the *CUNY Academic Works* journal in 2014 offered personal details for those that fled Estonia during the Soviet Era and feel threatened when considering the current security environment. Both *Tools of Destabilization* and *Winning the Information War* analyzed the Bronze Night incident, where historical tension between ethnic Russian and Estonian communities exploded into riots, augmented by cyber-attacks and demonstrations against the Estonian embassy in Moscow. The Latvian chapter in *Tools of Destabilization* gave a similar account as the Estonian chapter, as both countries confront similar issues in history and culture with large ethnic Russian communities, including towns near the Russian border that are almost exclusively populated by the Russian diaspora. The Latvian case study in *Winning the Information War* demonstrates tension between Soviet and Latvian veterans that fought on opposing sides, with popular Russian culture claiming this reflects inherent support for fascism by Latvian institutions. The Lithuanian chapter describes a different dynamic than Estonia or Latvia due to Lithuania's larger Polish minority and relatively small Russian community. Russia focuses their compatriots' policy in Lithuania on Russian language more so than culture, and uses these organizations to leverage the Polish political party to support Russian objectives.

Identification of persistent themes and target audiences relied on reference to all of the publications referenced above, distilling patterns from Russian repetition in the information environment. "Beyond Propaganda," *Tools of Destabilization*, "Winning the Information War," *Old Generation Warfare, War by Non-Military Means,* and the various publications from RAND all included evidence concerning what Russia communicates and how Russia targets populations for influence. The conclusion chapter of this thesis lists policy options derived from these various sources, centered on the need to revive the USIA and AMWG to gather and analyze information, coordinate with international institutions, and allocate resources to support interests of the US, NATO, and the Baltic States. The recommendations synthesized the need for greater international engagement, including through the EU. This would add credibility to the efforts and avoid the perception that the US is manipulating European institutions. There are additional recommendations for the Baltic States themselves to resolve minority rights issues that provide impetus for Russian compatriots' policies and mitigate their impact by assimilating at-risk populations into society.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will use a qualitative case study method to compile and analyze a variety of scholarly research. This includes academic and professional journals, think tank publications, Russian military doctrine, case studies produced by a myriad of sources, including government, nongovernmental, and international sources, and contemporary media reports. All sources are publically available secondary sources, with no new data generated or collected. This thesis defines the specific case as Russian influence by information means to pursue strategic objectives in the Baltic States during the period from Putin's ascendance to the Russian Presidency in 2000 to the present day. Sources describing Russian and Baltic cultures and US strategies during the Cold War provide context for the current environment, but are not included in the analysis. The actors within this case include Russia, the Baltic States as a group and as individual nations, the US, and NATO. Due to the qualitative design, this thesis relies on understanding the nature of the problems posed by Russian propaganda using the ends-ways-means construct, and does not lend itself to experimentation within the construct of this thesis.

The researcher derived the methodology for this thesis from the standards published by the Australian Department of Defense Joint and Operations Analysis Division in their "Qualitative Case Study Guidelines," published in 2013. This methodology consists of six interdependent phases: plan, design, prepare, collect, analyze, and share, and defines a case study as "a method for learning about a complex

instance, based on a comprehensive understanding of that instance obtained by extensive description of that instance taken as a whole and in its context."[20]

The planning phase of this research focused on identifying an appropriate research question derived from review of available literature. Further research identified an intuitive sequence of research questions that would lead to suitable, feasible, and acceptable responses from the US, NATO, and Baltic perspectives.

The design phase consisted of determining appropriate limits of research, settling on information as an instrument of national power capacity for influence within the Baltic region as a whole. The reason for this limiting focus was to control the scope of research while finding a region with common cultural and historical ties. Additionally, the Baltic States' unique history and vulnerability concerning Russia, from its Imperial through Soviet stages, makes this topic particularly prescient considering the recent resurgence of Russia in the international arena.

The prepare phase focused on developing the researcher's knowledge of the regional dynamics, including the historical and cultural ties to Russia and the rest of Europe. Understanding the distinctly different views of World War II from a Western and Eastern lens was particularly useful in interpreting the disparate views on contemporary events and how to view respective worldviews according to national interest.

The collection phase of this research consisted of cataloguing existing research in a logical sequence to answer the subsidiary and primary research questions. The researcher used an outline to facilitate reordering information and sequence of research

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[20] Saša Baškarada, *Qualitative Case Study Guidelines* (Victoria, AT: Australian Department of Defence, Joint and Operations Analysis Division, 2013), 1-13.

questions, and keep track of the catalogue of sources pertinent to this thesis. The variety

of literature increased the integrity of the information by ensuring no segment of the

thesis relied on the perceptions or analysis of a single source.

The analysis phase occurred throughout the entire project, as the qualitative nature

of the analysis began during the plan phase and continued as the catalogue of sources

grew, and the research questions developed and evolved. The process was primarily

inductive, as the project inherently assumed that solutions to the problems posed by

Russian information warfare exist. The researcher focused on deriving policy solutions

by narrowing the research questions to an appropriate scope and level of detail.

The sharing phase of the research conforms to the protocols of the US Army

Command and General Staff Officer Course for committee review, acceptance, and

publication.

The primary purpose of this research is to advocate for policy decisions and

resource allocations to mitigate threats posed by Russian information warfare in the

Baltic States. To consider the strategic environment from the Russian perspective, the

research methodology will derive Russian information warfare doctrine from their

publications and statements made by their military and civilian leadership. This doctrine

will provide the framework to consider contemporary and current Russian policy in light

of their doctrine, derived from case studies. To consider the strategic environment from

the US, NATO and Baltic States' perspective, the research methodology will consider

case studies from the last decade of the Cold War and how the US responded to Soviet

active measures, including responsibilities and authorities of the USIA and AMWG.

This thesis will consider the root causes of instability that provide Russia opportunities to exploit through their information campaigns in the Baltics, including minority rights, media access and quality, susceptibility of target audiences to influence, and tensions between the Baltic States and other NATO allies. Determining policy recommendations that address these root causes with holistic approaches that account for cultural and historical differences in the region will answer the primary research question of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

> War furnishes the best opportunities to distract domestic public opinion and
> destroy the remnants of the political and intellectual opposition within Russia
> itself. An undemocratic regime worried about the prospect of domestic economic
> social and political crises—such as those that now haunt Russia amid recession
> and falling oil prices—is likely to be pondering further acts of aggression.
> — Andrei Illarionov (former economic adviser to Vladimir Putin)

> I would describe it as the heart and soul of the Soviet Intelligence - was
> subversion. Not intelligence collection, but subversion: active measures to
> weaken the West, to drive wedges in the Western community alliances of all
> sorts, particularly NATO, to sow discord among allies, to weaken the United
> States in the eyes of the people of Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and thus
> to prepare ground in case the war really occurs. To make America more
> vulnerable to the anger and distrust of other peoples.[21]
> ─ Oleg Kalugin, KGB Major General (retired)

The purpose of this paper is to determine effective strategic options for the US,

NATO, and the Baltic States as they confront Russian soft power incursions of

propaganda, disinformation, and information warfare in the Baltic States. Under Putin's

leadership, Russia's first interest is to increase its prestige as a counterbalance to the

West under American hegemony, and ensure Russian security. The Baltic States, among

NATOs newest and smallest members, and as former Soviet Socialist Republics with

institutional memories of the costs associated with Russian occupation, are distinctly

vulnerable to Russian influence.

The lessons of Crimea indicate that Russian escalation begins in the information

environment, with a nuanced and sophisticated amalgam of covert and overt information

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[21] Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin's Russia," 19.

warfare. The NATO alliance must therefore proactively develop policies and strategies to counter Russian soft power. These solutions must cover all dimensions of the information environment to alleviate conditions ripe for Russian exploitation and strengthen civil societies to be resilient in the face of nefarious influence. Failure to address Russian influence early may lead to a military quandary that fractures the NATO alliance and unravels Western institutions that have promoted peace and stability in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

<div align="center">Russian Strategic Objectives</div>

Since ascending to the presidency in 2000, Putin has focused Russian domestic and foreign policy towards restoring Russia's prestige as a great power. The 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation stated clearly that the foreign policy activities will accomplish consolidation of "the Russian Federation's position as a centre of influence in today's world;"[22] the unstated corollary is the corresponding diminution of Western institutions and influence that have grown in prominence since the end of the Cold War. Russian securitization in international relations bears consideration in the context of Putin's own party, United Russia, which published "The Party of National Success" in 2003 decrying the collapse of the USSR as a tragedy.[23] Putin himself made

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[22] Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs,* November 30, 2016, accessed March 22, 2017, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248.

[23] Andis Kudors, "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Latvia," in *Tools of Destabilization*, ed. Mike Winnerstig (Stockholm, SE: FOI, 2014), 84.

this assertion in 2005.[24] This nostalgic view of the Soviet legacy continues to affect how Putin's Russia views former Soviet republics, and the USSR's influence imposed throughout Eastern Europe.

Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has attempted to integrate the economies of the newly independent states of the Former Soviet Union. In 2009, Russian senior advisor Sergei Glazyev framed Russia's choice as either developing its own power sphere to exert its influence in the world, or subordinate Russian interests to existing power structures.[25] The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is the latest iteration of this concept in Russia's foreign policy under Putin's leadership, originally including Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in 2014, and accepting Armenia and Kyrgyzstan in 2015. Russia uses membership in the EEU as a lever to discourage bilateral negotiations between member nations and Western institutions, primarily the European Union (EU). The Obama administration consistently resisted EEU expansion, and Secretary Clinton in 2012 called the project "a move to re-Sovietize the region."[26]

The EEU represents Russia's objective to support the distribution of power and influence into a multipolar world order. It is important to note that Russia's understanding of multipolar is not wholly congruent with the Western concept of

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[24] Anna Bulakh et al., "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Estonia," in *Tools of Destabilization*, ed. Mike Winnerstig (Stockholm, SE: FOI, 2014), 32.

[25] The International Crisis Group, "The Eurasian Economic Union: Power, Politics and Trade," Europe and Central Asia Report No 240 (Brussels, BE: International Crisis Group, 2016), 19.

[26] Ibid., 9.

multilateralism.[27] Putin disparaged the West's "multilateral" agenda in a speech to the

Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2007 as essentially "unipolar . . . in which there

is one master, one sovereign." His ostensible target of derision was the US driving

NATO's expansion into the former Soviet sphere.[28]

Additionally, Russia views protection of the ethnic Russian diaspora, the so-called

Compatriots' Policy, as a strategic objective of its foreign policy, presumably as part of

humanitarian action, though this is most useful for Russia as justification to intervene in

sovereign nations, such as South Ossetia in 2008 or Crimea in 2014.[29] This pretext causes

enduring concern in the Baltics, as Russia frequently invokes humanitarian concern for

Russian minorities in their nations.

<u>Russia's View of its Role in the World</u>

Divergence between Western and Eastern views of the Second World War (or

Great Patriotic War, from Russia's perspective) provide significant context to understand

Russian policy and objectives. Similarly, Russia's view of the end of the Cold War as a

peaceful transition inspires policies that expect Russia's global position should remain

analogous to that of the USSR.[30] Considered in that light, the unilateral recognition of

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[27] AOWG, "Ambiguous Threats and External Influences: Phase 2," 9-10.

[28] Vladimir Putin, "Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy," *Washington Post,* February 10, 2007, accessed March 22, 2017, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/ AR2007021200555_pf.html.

[29]AOWG, "Ambiguous Threats and External Influences: Phase 2," 63.

[30] Ibid., 7.

Kosovo in 1998, abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, and NATO expansion into the former Soviet sphere constituted a breach of trust between great powers and not an evolution toward universal security guarantees.[31]

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) also serves as a distinct cultural pillar for eastern culture, and a necessary component of "spiritual security." The Federal Security Service, or *Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti*, (FSB) identifies both the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant communities as threats analogous to Islamic extremists, no small statement considering the threat posed to Russia by separatists in the largely Muslim North Caucasus, particularly Chechnya and Dagestan. Traditional Eastern values help safeguard the historical memory against Western decadence. Russian "religious diplomacy" therefore plays a key role in Russia's view of multipolarity, both as a unifying theme for domestic security and foreign diplomacy that supports the Russian Compatriots' Policy that targets the Russian diaspora, which resides in countries that otherwise do not identify with Orthodox culture.[32]

In light of perceived unipolar influence emanating from the West, Russia sees its role as leading ethnic Russians, Eastern Slavs, and a Eurasian political, economic, and military bloc, roughly encompassing the area covered by the former Soviet Union. As stated before, Russia seeks to take the mantle of leadership in an evolving global system organized along multipolar power centers. In order to actuate this vision, Russia must

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[31] Gvosdev and Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 90-91.

[32] Alicja Curanović, *The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 142-143.

fracture western institutions that enable US hegemony exercised through NATO expansion.

Russia's View of NATO's Expansion into the Soviet Sphere

NATO's expansion since the end of the Cold War has exclusively been into the former Soviet sphere, first to the Visegrád Group in 1999, the Vilnius Group in 2004, Albania and Croatia in 2009, and Montenegro in 2017. Though Georgia entered into a formal dialogue in 2006 to discuss accession, no Membership Action Plan emerged since the Russo-Georgian War in 2008.[33] As late as 2001, Putin stated in a joint press conference with the Finnish President that Baltic accession to NATO was "their own choice, though we see no objective reason for NATO expansion."[34]

Western observers grew increasingly concerned over Russian intransigence in former policy during the years leading up to the global recession in 2008. In 2007, evidence pointed to covert actors with ties to Russia responsible for organizing riots in Tallinn and conducting waves of cyber-attacks for two weeks in Estonia, largely shutting down commercial and government servers. Russia vehemently opposed planned US missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, and in July of 2007, suspended compliance with the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, in force since the closing days of the Cold War. One of the factors that apparently motivated Russian military action

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[33] Bruce P. Jackson, "A Turning Point for Europe's East," Hoover.org, April 1, 2010, accessed March 22, 2017, http://www.hoover.org/research/turning-point-europes-east.

[34] Marko Mihkelson, "Baltic-Russian Relations in Light of Expanding NATO and EU," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 276.

against Georgia during the Russo-Georgian War and economic action against Ukraine in the form of reduced energy in 2008 was these two nations formalizing negotiations for NATO accession.[35] Putin and his coterie appeared driven by the belief that the US and NATO took advantage of post-Soviet turmoil during the Yeltsin years, driving Putin's aggressive approach to restore Russian prestige to Soviet-era levels and strengthen centralized control of the media and economic levers of society.[36]

While Obama's professed desire to reset relations between Russia and the West produced improved rhetoric between NATO and Russia, the relationship remains marked by suspicion between the two sides, with Russian implacability increasing as Eastern Europe seeks closer integration with the west. Russian officials view the eruption of "color revolutions," especially in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2005, as Western-orchestrated attempts at regime change.[37] Russian Analyst Dmitri Trenin wrote in 2009 that Putin saw these movements as US orchestrated conspiracies to either reduce Russian influence in the Eurasian space or even "a dress rehearsal for . . . installing a pro-US liberal puppet regime in the Kremlin."[38] Demonstrating a drastic evolution in public rhetoric since tacitly accepting Baltic accession to NATO in 2001, Putin commented on Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 as "partly due to . . . considerations that if we do

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[35] Jim Nichol, "Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Issues," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 43-44.

[36] Ibid., 4.

[37] Ibid., 73.

[38] Ibid., 42.

nothing, then at some point,. . ., NATO will drag Ukraine in and they will say it doesn't

have anything to do with you."[39]

In view of this perceived threat from NATO, Russia embarked on a military

modernization campaign in 2008. In addition to demonstrations that Russia can mobilize

as many as 100,000 military personnel on its Western borders with little to no notice,

NATO analysts estimate that Russia may deploy as many as 60,000 personnel by air

within 72 hours.[40] Russian information warfare doctrine has similarly modernized to

account for changing dynamics in the information environment and observed potential to

influence through emerging means. Finally, Russia has stood up elite special operations

forces that can deploy with virtually no notice to anywhere in the world.[41]

<div align="center">Russian Information Warfare Doctrine</div>

Official Russian information warfare doctrine depicts pervasive threats to their

homeland in the information space, and describes information warfare as a wide-ranging

discipline that encompasses a broad range of means, including targeted and general

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[39] AOWG, "Ambiguous Threats and External Influences in the Baltic States and Poland: Phase I" (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2014), 4.

[40] Jeffrey Rathke, "Can NATO Deter Russia in View of the Conventional Military Imbalance in the East?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 30, 2015, accessed March 22, 2017, https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-nato-deter-russia-view-conventional-military-imbalance-east.

[41] Christopher Marsh, *Developments in Russian Special Operations: Russia's Spetsnaz, SOF, and Special Operations Forces Command* (Ottawa: Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, 2017), accessed April 8, 2017, http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/mdn-dnd/D4-10-21-2017-eng.pdf.

operations, computer network attacks, manipulation of the mass media, and coopting political processes.[42]

A more granular view is provided by Chief of the Russian General Staff General Valery Gerasimov, who published a treatise concerning his view of Russian warfare in February of 2013 titled "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations." Though not official Russian doctrine, Gerasimov's position of authority, and the chain of events that would unfold the following year in Crimea, and continue to unfold in Eastern Ukraine today, encourages careful consideration of his thoughts on Russian warfare.[43]

The broad outlines of the so-called "Gerasimov Doctrine" involve transitioning from traditional concepts of regime change that includes an assumed pretext, such as prevention of genocide (in Kosovo) or weapons of mass destruction (as seen in Iraq) to a modern and covert concept. Gerasimov identified modern means to shape conditions prior to conflict as traditional media, social media, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), cyberattacks, political opposition, civil disorder, and covert use of Special Forces. As the targeted regime increases violence to preserve order, this pretext allows intervention by peacekeeping forces. Upon the regime's collapse, these peacekeeping forces assume authority and install a politically amenable regime.[44]

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[42] Ulrik Franke, *War by Non-Military Means: Understanding Russian Information Warfare* (Stockholm, SE: Swedish Defence Research Institute, 2015), 16-20.

[43] Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review* (2016): 30.

[44] Ibid., 33-34.

The roots of Russian information warfare doctrine lie in Soviet-era Deep Operations: defeat layered defenses with an offense intended to defeat the enemy simultaneously across their depth, with modern information warfare techniques targeted against an adversary's morale.[45] Using the pretext of their Compatriots' Policy, Russia enables the organization and resourcing of separatist movements among ethnic Russian communities, augmented with covert financial and military aid. The adversary must then choose whether to integrate dissidents into governing structures, weakening their civil structures from within, or further isolate dissident communities and risk Russian intervention on humanitarian grounds. The humanitarian pretext also isolates the adversary from outside assistance, as other nations must choose to either confront Russia militarily or accept the humanitarian pretext, allowing Russia to de-escalate the conflict on favorable terms.[46]

Because Russian information warfare includes a combination of military and nonmilitary means, including a network of NGOs and Kremlin-owned media networks to disseminate propaganda, the Russian Foreign Ministry includes management of these means in its institutional education.[47] The integrated nature of information and political warfare in Russian doctrine requires exploration of the Russian formal and informal foreign policy structures, and their complementary relationships in the information space.

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[45] Sinclair, "Old Generation Warfare," 10.

[46] Ibid., 11-12.

[47] Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money* (New York, NY: The Institute of Modern Russia, 2014), 12.

<u>Formal and Informal Foreign Policy Structures</u>

Joseph Nye's definition of soft power as "influence by an actor with the power of attraction," is the dominant Western view of the concept.[48] Putin's foreign policy defines soft power as "instruments and methods to achieve foreign policy objectives without the use of weapons – information and other levers of influence."[49] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) further divides these levers among the categories of culture, education, science, technology, legal assistance to compatriots, consular work, and the Russian Orthodox Church, and all reside under the heading of humanitarian trends that specifically complement traditional diplomacy.[50]

The Russian Compatriots' Policy is a key component of Russian soft power and foreign influence. Sergei Karaganov, then chair of Russia's Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, first described the policy in 1992. What is also sometimes referred to as the Karaganov Doctrine advocated the use of ethnic Russian populations residing in the former Soviet space, their so-called "near abroad," to advance Russian foreign policy objectives. According to Maliukevicius, the policy aims to keep compatriots culturally isolated in their home countries by encouraging continued identification with Russian

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[48] Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2004), 5.

[49] Gundrun Persson, "Russian Influence and Soft Power in the Baltic States: the View from Moscow," in *Tools of Destabilization*, ed. Mike Winnerstig (Stockholm: FOI, 2014), 16.

[50] Ibid., 16-20.

culture and language, preserving these populations for exploitation to implement Russian interests.[51]

The main actors in coordinating among compatriots' communities and linking their organization to other foreign policy instruments are the *Rossotrudnichestvo* agency, operating within the MFA and *Russkii Mir*, an NGO catering to those seeking information or culture about Russia and encouraging the study of the Russian language abroad. *Rossotrudnichestvo* operates offices in 77 countries, though its only presence in the Baltics is an office in Lithuania. Estonia and Latvia both endure criticism by the agency for not allowing it to open cultural and language centers within their countries. The agency also administers a number of other instruments of soft power. These include *Russkii Vek* (Russian Century), an online journal catering to Russians living abroad, a program encouraging voluntary return of compatriots to Russia, and a number of youth outreach organizations. *Russkii Mir*, meaning "Russian World," in English, is ostensibly an NGO, though it also operates under the Russian MFA and Ministry of Education. Its charter is similar to *Rossotrudnichestvo*, though its audience goes beyond ethnic Russian communities to include any organization exploring Russian culture or language. *Russkii Mir* also provides textbooks communicating Russian views of history to schools, and, according to Persson, funneling money to dissident organizations and Russian-aligned political parties in the near abroad.[52]

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[51] Nerijus Maliukevicius, "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Lithuania," in *Tools of Destabilization*, ed. Mike Winnerstig (Stockholm, SE: FOI, 2014), 113-114.

[52] Persson, "Russian Influence and Soft Power in the Baltic States: the View from Moscow," 22-25.

The lines between independent and Kremlin-controlled mass media is deliberately blurred in the near abroad. Kremlin-owned news media crowd out legitimate news in the Russian sphere, drowning out legitimate news media with a flood of irrelevant information or propaganda.[53] Russian media manipulation deliberately makes use of multiple channels, with no commitment to consistency between them. Different outlets owned by the Kremlin will often broadcast different views of the same events, depending on the targeted audience and Russian objectives. RT (formerly Russia Today) is widely available in the US and throughout the world through cable packages or an online format, in high quality broadcast and with all the trappings of legitimate news. It provides an easily accessible example of Russian propaganda to foreign audiences, with the only unifying theme being criticism of Western institutions.[54] The Sputnik News Service is a state owned media company that includes the RIA Novosti news wire, Voice of Russia, and Sputnik News. These media channels primarily target anti-establishment audiences predisposed to sympathize with anti-American messages, and provide fodder for online discussion, mobilizations, and incitement.[55] Complementing and amplifying these forays into traditional media, Russia's strategic communication apparatus utilizes a large body of online "trolls" employed in factory settings and working 12 hours shifts with daily

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[53] Sijbren de Jong et al., *Beyond the Cold War of Words: How Online Media Can Make a Difference in the Post-Soviet Space* (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2015), 5.

[54] Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian 'Firehose of Falsehood' Propaganda Model* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), 7-8.

[55] Edward Lucas and Peter Pomeranzev, *Winning the Information War* (Washington, DC: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016), 37-39.

quotas of approximately 135 posts per day supporting Russian influence operations.[56] While a skeptical observer may be tempted to dismiss such industry as folly, these self-supporting networks present an image of organic mass movements. Social media networks motivate disenfranchised populations to self-organize, and drive traditional media coverage that not only drowns out constructive and informed debate, but also lends an air of credibility to otherwise crazy conspiracy theories that support Kremlin objectives.[57]

Religious diplomacy, as an outreach from the "Russian World," and exercised through the ROC provides another link to ethnic Russian minorities in the near abroad. Both *Russkii Mir* and the *Rossotrudnichestvo* agency signed cooperative agreements with the ROC, and Putin himself portrays the ROC as the defender of Christian values in a declining world influenced by Western decadence and secularism. This approach is not novel, but is rooted in Russian history, as Imperial Russia under Ivan III saw itself as the "Third Rome," after the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans in the 15th century. The post-Renaissance West advocated this identity to motivate the Russian state to stand with the West against the Ottomans. The Russian title of "czar" owes its etymology to the Roman title of "Caesar," and Imperial Russia used its supposed favor by God to justify expanding its temporal borders into lands previously abandoned to barbarians.[58]

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[56] Ibid., 40-41.

[57] Ibid., 27.

[58] Kuchins, "Why Russia is so Russian," 319-320.

Russian application of soft power displayed its efficacy in Crimea in 2014, both in shaping conditions for conventional forces to enable annexation and isolating Ukraine from outside assistance until meeting its political objectives. The problems for Russia in the Baltics are more complex, however, as NATO's security guarantees carry a potentially steep cost should Russia commit militarily. Russian objectives therefore are more modest, requiring a more gradual and careful escalation of means.

<u>Russian Strategic Objectives in the Baltic States</u>

As stated previously, the Baltic States occupy a unique position between East and West. As former Soviet republics, they share a common, if turbulent, history with Russia. As members of NATO and the EU, they both integrated with Western institutions and provided Russia with a focus to influence these processes through Eastern cultural institutions dating back to the Soviet-era. It is in this frame that Russian strategic objectives in the Baltics complement global policy objectives. Russia seeks to leverage the Baltics to support Russian prestige and influence in a multipolar world order that balances power against the West in general, counters perceived threats from NATO, and reduces American influence in particular within the Russian sphere of influence.

Overall, Russia's strategic objective in the Baltic States is destabilization, using the region as a lever to weaken Western institutions that it perceives as economic, military, and political threats.[59] Better relations appear secondary, as the size of the Baltic economies, through greater in scale on a *per capita* basis than Russia, are dwarfed in

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[59] Mike Winnerstig, "Introduction and Executive Summary," in *Tools of Destabilization: Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence in the Baltic States*, ed. Mike Winnerstig (Stockholm, SE: FOI, 2014), 11.

absolute terms.[60] Their populations and militaries are similarly not significant prizes for

Russian policy intent on rebuilding an Eastern bloc through economic or collective

security institutions. Compared to the 23,000 Baltic military personnel, with expected

augmentation in wartime by other security and paramilitary organizations, NATO

estimates that Russia's Western Military district alone consists of at least 250,000 service

members.[61] The Baltic States' value to Russia resides in their susceptibility to Russian

influence and the difficult strategic decisions conveyed to NATO by virtue of their

membership in the alliance.

<center>Russian Information Warfare Ways and Means in the Baltic States</center>

Russian influence sometimes spills over into physical or political domains. All

three of the Baltic States suffered Russian provocations short of military aggression in

late 2014. Russian agents abducted an Estonian police officer near its border with Estonia

in 2014, subsequently convicting him of espionage and negotiating his release in

exchange for an Estonian security official found to be working for the Russian FSB in

2012. Russian MFA official Konstantin Dolgov delivered a speech in Riga to a regional

conference of compatriots from the Baltic States in which he decried the "xenophobic

and neo-Nazi tendencies" among members of the EU. Lithuanian prosecutors reported

that Russia requested their assistance to open criminal cases against 1,500 Lithuanians

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[60] World Bank, "GDP per capita, PPP (current international $)," 2015, accessed March 23, 2017, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP. PP.CD?name_desc=false.

[61] Māris Andžāns, "Patching the Shield: The Baltic States On the Road Towards Practical NATO Guarantees," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2016): 14.

<center>43</center>

that refused to serve in the Soviet military 25 years earlier, leading Lithuanian authorities to caution these individuals not travel outside of NATO or EU member nations at the risk that they would face criminal prosecution in Russia.[62]

While these provocations serve to increase tensions periodically, they ultimately motivate the Baltic States to rely on Western institutions for assistance and relief, increasing solidarity and readiness against aggression. Russian soft power influence poses difficult challenges as authorities struggle to effectively expose and respond in a dynamic information environment. For this reason, Russia primarily seeks to exercise their version of soft power to influence populations that support its objectives in the Baltics. Russia uses multiple complementary ways and means, consistent with the doctrine outlined earlier. Official support for compatriots' outreach provides organization, while media depictions support Russian themes. News and popular media denounce Western aggression and emphasize the Russian, or Soviet, role in liberating Europe and defeating fascism during the Second World War. Textbooks provided by NGOs controlled by the Kremlin inculcate children in Russian language education to Russian views of history, distorting and diluting Baltic culture and identity. Youth outreach and summer camps provide additional venues to organize and inspire pride in Russian culture and history. These same NGOs provide money and resources, synchronized with media reporting, to support political parties representing Russia's interests among ethnic Russians and disenfranchised minorities.[63]

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[62] Persson, "Russian Influence and Soft Power in the Baltic States: the View from Moscow," 18

[63] Ibid., 17-27.

The following sections will examine Russian ways and means of its soft power influence in the individual nations in the Baltic States. While there are historical and cultural similarities between each nation, they bear consideration individually before attempting to recommend policies and strategies to mitigate Russian influence.

Estonia

Estonia's greatest challenge to integration with the West has been resolving the status of its Russian minority communities, which as of 2013 comprised 25.2 percent of its population. Narva and Sillamäe are towns situated in northeast Estonia near the Russian border and are majority Russian speaking, presenting a dilemma similar to that Ukraine faced in Crimea prior to the peninsula's annexation in 2014. The towns both approved a referendum for autonomy in 1993, though Estonia's court system ruled the vote illegal and local governing bodies decided to respect that decision. Thankfully for Estonian authorities, the experience of the towns' residents traveling to Russia across the border over the past two decades has tempered desires for integration with Russia. While this reduces the likelihood of violent separatist movements, providing Russian authorities the required pretext for "humanitarian" intervention, cultural differences among communities identifying with Russia constitute barriers to integrating with an Estonian society seeking greater identification with Western values and institutions.[64]

The original impetus for compatriots' organization originated from Estonia's 1992 citizenship policy, adopted after the country left the USSR. Only those citizens of

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[64] Andrew Radin, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), 21-22.

the Estonian republic from 1918 to 1940 attained automatic citizenship, preventing 32 percent of its population from participating in the country's first post-Soviet elections. This appeared to be prudent policy at the time, as these Russian communities generally opposed Estonian independence and preferred to retain the structure of the USSR. Estonia raised further barriers to naturalization in 1995, ostensibly because Russia simplified citizenship for stateless persons. Estonian naturalization since the 1990s has increased the proportion of citizens in its population from 68 to 84 percent, but the original disaffection of these communities provided organizational inertia that persists and an opportunity for exploitation through the Russian Compatriots' Policy.[65]

Both *Rossotrudnichestvo* and *Russkii Mir* established Estonian branches prior to 2010 to administer the Compatriots' Policy in Estonia.[66] These compatriots' organizations rally support for Russian language education, keeping these children in Russian sponsored curricula, and making integration into society more difficult. Children that fail to integrate are thus more challenged finding employment than their Estonian peers, and prone to exploitation as adults. Russian diplomats in the *Rossotrudnichestvo* work directly with parents in disaffected regions, further marginalizing national and local governments. If legal disputes arise in education or social services, the Russian MFA also manages a legal support fund to advocate for compatriots facing discrimination abroad. These children are then recruited into Russian sponsored youth programs, attending

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[65]Anna Bulakh, et al., "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Estonia," in *Tools of Destabilization*, ed. Mike Winnerstig (Stockholm, SE: FOI, 2014), 35-37.

[66] Ibid., 40.

camps in Kaliningrad that support Russian views of history, whitewashing Soviet abuses while amplifying the Soviet role in liberating Eastern Europe from fascism. Russia also emphasizes that the Baltic nations invited Soviet forces in 1940, ignoring the implications of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement.[67]

While support for Russian language and culture is not nefarious, *per se*, by keeping students in exclusively Russian language instruction until the end of the 9th grade, students struggle to attain proficiency in the Estonian language. Complementing these struggles, Russian language media frame these academic difficulties in school testing as deliberate policy threats against Russian communities. The NGO, Russian Schooling in Estonia, formed around the mission of challenging Estonian language policies. This NGO played an active role organizing support for the activist group *Nochnoi Dozor,* or "Night Watch," discussed in more detail for its role sparking domestic unrest during the 2007 Bronze Night incident.[68]

Estonia's history as it relates to Russia and the USSR remains a source of great tension among those that view Soviet occupation of Estonia as legitimate, and those that do not. Numerous NGOs attempt to link Estonian history with support for Nazis, and thus frame opposition to Soviet imagery and narratives as support for fascism. The Bronze Night incident, actually a series of events in April 2007 that included riots, cyber-attacks, and political crisis, provides a useful case study to observe the effects that result from conflict over historical narratives. Compatriots' organizations, NGOs, unattributed cyber-

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[67] Ibid., 40-43.

[68] Ibid., 43-44.

attacks, and Kremlin propaganda masquerading as legitimate news media all worked together to support Moscow's disinformation narratives and exacerbate fissures between Eastern and Western segments in Estonian society.[69]

The Bronze Night incident emerged from a decision by the Estonian government to move a statue commemorating fallen Soviet soldiers from the Second World War nicknamed the Bronze Soldier, along with Red Army soldiers' remains buried near the statue. The government decided to relocate the statue and remains from the center of Tallinn to a military cemetery located outside of the capital. The FSB organized resistance to the planned transfer months earlier, forming the *Nochnoi Dozor* to stand watch and prevent the movement of the Statue or the remains. Russian language media portrayed the decision as an insult against the memory of Soviet sacrifices in The Great Patriotic War and an assault on fundamental human rights of ethnic Russians residing in Estonia. Alexander Prokhanov, a prominent Russian writer, ideologue, and leader of the ultra-nationalist newspaper *Zavtra*, went so far as to claim on television that Russia's parliament should declare Estonia as a hostile nation, and advocated seizure of Narva by force if necessary.

Events exploded on April 26th when excavation of the statue and remains began. 1,500 people assembled, with some of them attacking police, civilians, and government buildings. Rioting intensified the next night as efforts to move the statue increased the next day, and continued until the 28th. The incident provided a venue for Russian

[69]Leila Roos, "Pawns and Paranoia: Baltic-American Anxiety over Russian Aggression" (CUNY Academic Works, 2014), 6, accessed February 25, 2017, http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gj_etds/20.

diplomatic pressure and led global headlines. Russian disinformation described fascist desecration of the tombs and framed the riots as government sanctioned oppression of Russian minorities. Russian media claimed officials dismembered and discarded the statue and threw the bones of the soldiers away, instead of conducting the planned relocation, and used the protests as pretext to arrest and torture Russians gathered at the site.[70]

Cyber-attacks against government servers hindered Estonian authorities' response efforts for weeks after the riots, and a pro-Russian youth movement besieged the Estonian embassy in Moscow for four days. Ultimately, Western diplomatic intervention, and Estonian law enforcement prevented the incident from escalating beyond the riots, but the entire episode served as a grim foreshadow of events in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.[71] While the *Nochnoi Dozor* is no longer active, as the relocation and internment ultimately took place, former members found purpose in other organizations, such as World without Nazism, continuing to rhetorically connect Estonia's government with fascism.[72]

As demonstrated in the Bronze Night episode, Russian and Estonian speakers occupy different spaces in the information domain. The Kremlin's Russian language media is higher quality than programming produced domestically and thus more popular among the compatriots' communities. These Kremlin-owned channels consistently

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[70] Lucas and Pomeranzev, "Winning the Information War," 22-23.

[71] Ibid., 24.

[72] Bulakh, et al., "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Estonia," 46.

support Russian themes, emphasizing the threats posed by pro-fascist Western regimes and celebrating Russian and Soviet history. Besides the news, this also includes popular media, such as feature films, documentaries, music, radio programs, and cultural festivals. Consistent communication through the media provides a venue for political mobilization around the Centre Party, the primary vehicle for pro-Russian policies in Estonia.

The ultimate lever of influence at the societal level, and the most effective means to redirect Estonia's integration from the West to the East, would be through their domestic political processes. Russia's efforts in this arena have produced mixed results, as the Russian minority in Estonia split their support among so many parties that none could achieve a large enough percentage to gain seats in Estonia's government. To remedy this shortcoming, Moscow consolidated support for Estonia's Centre Party after that party signed a cooperation agreement with Putin's own United Russia party in 2004. Kremlin-owned media enables outreach to Russian language communities by featuring the Centre Party prominently in news reports, biasing coverage in favor of the party and against the Estonian establishment. Because of consolidation, polling suggests that 75 percent of ethnic Russians support the Centre Party, though it is not apparent that the party would ever have enough representation to shape anything beyond rhetoric in regards to Estonian policy.[73]

Russian soft power influence remains a concern of Estonian authorities, but recedes proportionately as the issue of Russian speaking stateless persons moves towards

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[73] Ibid., 49-53.

resolution. Nevertheless, Russian media remains a wedge between communities as long as disinformation means remain unchallenged in the information space. Without banning these outlets outright, individuals' personal experiences over time may prove to be the most effective counter-propaganda technique. Efforts to integrate ethnic Russians into Estonian society, while difficult in the face of assertive compatriots' outreach, nonetheless progress as these Russian communities observe life in Russia compared to their own quality of life in Estonia.

<div align="center">Latvia</div>

Similar to Estonia, Latvia confronts challenges with its large ethnic Russian minority and intrusive Kremlin media. Compatriots' Policies in Latvia use similar methods for mobilization and exploitation in education and youth organizations. Of particular concern in Latvia is Russia's effective manipulation of the Harmony Party to support pro-Russian positions, in both municipal and national governing bodies.

In the education realm, *Russkii Mir* spent over €170,000 between 2008 and 2014 to support cultural organizations, provide pro-Russian textbooks to schools, and produce films that support Russian views of history, particularly the conditions leading up to Soviet occupation of the Baltic States.[74] The network of Russian-connected NGOs in Latvia is impressive, as *Russkii Mir* reports that it supports nearly 100 NGOs that fund compatriots' organizations. Many of these NGOs provide support for historians commissioned by the FSB, and lecture on regional history referring to documents that

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[74] Kudors, "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Latvia," 76.

conventional historians cannot access and therefore cannot vet.[75] These historical

sources, combined with Russian produced programming, draw attention to the Latvian

Legion in an attempt to make contemporary conclusions that Latvian authorities are

inherently sympathetic to neo-Nazi policies, commonly around the anniversaries of

Western and Russian commemoration of Victory in Europe celebrations, March 16th and

May 8th and 9th, respectively.[76]

The Latvian Legion consisted of volunteers that fought with Germans during the

Second World War. While native Latvians view the Latvian Legion in light of their

resistance to Soviet occupation, the Russian view is that celebration of their memory

constitutes celebration of Nazi ideology. Kremlin-owned media take advantage of annual

surviving veterans' commemorations to support Moscow's anti-fascist theme. This

provides a venue for NGOs, such as World Without Nazism, to claim these surviving

veterans were perpetrators of the Holocaust and guilty of other war crimes.

Disinformation includes exaggerating the size and length of parades, claiming marchers

crossed Riga, while in fact they only traveled about 700 meters from a museum

preserving artifacts from the Soviet occupation to the Latvian Legion monument. Russian

troll factories use these events to mobilize online social networks, further embedding and

inflaming outrage against perceived fascist support in both the Russian and Latvian

languages.[77]

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[75] Ibid., 92-94.

[76] Lucas and Pomeranzev, "Winning the Information War," 25.

[77] Ibid., 25-26.

Besides historical ties, Russia encourages other aspects of their culture through compatriots' outreach and popular media. Russian music radio broadcasts target Russian-language audiences with multiple channels, and promote a music festival in Jurmela, a popular resort town for Russian tourists. The festival, branded New Wave, celebrates Russian composers, and features a prominent symbol of a wave colored similarly to Russia's flag. Again, celebration of culture is not a negative endeavor, but organizers often use the festival as a venue to ridicule Latvian national symbols, including the Latvian national anthem and traditional dress. Russian television broadcasts the festival, widening the audience witnessing ridicule of Latvian culture.[78]

The media environment as a whole in Latvia is similarly bifurcated as in Estonia. The media market includes both state-owned and privately owned companies, and the government generally allows access to all outlets. Economic imperatives recently spurred media ownership consolidation, reducing press access as fewer owners control more channels. In this environment of reduced revenue, Kremlin produced Russian language media is available to private broadcasters at a relatively low cost. As in Estonia, production values of programs from Kremlin-owned or affiliated companies are greater than those made locally, and remain popular with local audiences. Latvian authorities attempted to limit foreign-language broadcasts in 2010 by decreeing that 65 percent of programming must be in the Latvian language, though the EU embassy reports that in Latvia's east, citizens can only receive Russian-language news. The Latvian public generally regards Latvian state-owned media as reliable, with Russian broadcast and print

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[78] Kudors, "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Latvia," 95-99.

media perceived as propaganda. In light of access issues in the eastern areas of Latvia, this may mean that Russian speakers only have access to Russian propaganda as their source of news. Online activists circulated an image in January of 2015 showing the Latgale region of Latvia as a separate "Latgale People's Republic," with its own flag and Cyrillic writing.[79]

At both the local and national level, The Harmony Centre party represents Russian interests in Latvia. Alfred Rukis, largely responsible for the organization of Harmony Centre, was a member of the Latvian Communist Party. The party originally unified a broad group of socialist and Russian advocacy parties with support from the Kremlin, going so far as to participate with Putin's United Russia party congress in St. Petersburg in 2009. In the financial realm, Latvian government officials claim that the party received $1 million funneled through compatriots' organizations. Within the Russian MFA, the same department responsible for coordinating with Harmony Centre was also responsible for preventing colored revolutions in the Russian sphere. Online activists exposed surreptitious communications between a leader of Harmony Centre and the Russian Embassy intended to coordinate communication strategy between policy positions and Russian media reporting.[80]

As evidence of the effectiveness of Kremlin media support, Harmony Centre won municipal elections in Riga. While municipal elections might not seem overly influential in a large country, Latvia's capital is residence to almost half of the country's population.

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[79] Jong et al., "Beyond the Cold War of Words," 40-42.

[80] Kudors, "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Latvia," 82-84.

The new mayor explicitly expressed support for Russian language and cultural ties to Riga. In 2010, the Latvian President became the only leader among the Baltic States to take an official state visit to Moscow as an incentive for improving bilateral relations. The head of the Latvian Orthodox Church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, demonstrated the cultural influence of the ROC by accompanying the Latvian president to Moscow.[81]

Religious diplomacy in Latvia does not focus on ethnic division between Latvian and Russian populations, but instead operates as a lever that emphasizes Eastern morality versus Western decadence, or Eurasian integration as an alternative to "Atlanticist" polices. The Latvian Orthodox Church is the third largest faith in Latvia, with significant influence among compatriots' communities. Latvian civilian leaders have occasionally used the Latvian Orthodox Church as an intermediary and cultural medium for communication. In 2004, Latvia's president supported an exchange of holy relics between the ROC and Latvian churches, and in 2006 personally greeted ROC leaders during their visit and used the occasion to greet members of the church during Orthodox Christmas celebrations. In 2008, an offshoot of the ROC, resident in Latvia since the 17th century to avoid persecution in Russia, made a particular point of emphasizing their role supporting Latvian culture as an indigenous people, but not as Russian separatists. In this way, Latvia exercises its own religious diplomacy as outreach to their ethnic Russian communities.[82]

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[81] Ibid., 85, 89-90.

[82] Ibid., 96-97.

The greatest threats Russian influence pose to Latvia is through domestic politics and manipulation of compatriots through the historical lens of the Soviet occupation. Integration of these marginalized populations require progress in the realm of truly independent and high-quality Russian language media and integration of ethnic Russian populations into institutions outside of Moscow's control. Municipal elections, particularly in the Latvia's capital, can have national policy ramifications when such elections affect almost half of the population and coordinate their communications and policies with Moscow. Failure to address integration of Russian communities in Latvian society could further strengthen political ties between pro-Russian organizations and cause further retrenchment of these communities into Russian controlled media.

Lithuania

Russian approaches to soft power influence in Lithuania differ when compared to Estonia and Latvia due to Lithuania's demographic differences. While Russian minorities comprise just over a quarter of the population in Latvia and Estonia, ethnic Russians in Lithuania comprise only six percent of the entire population, and is in fact the second largest minority in the country after Poles. Russia therefore identifies compatriots according to their use of the Russian language and focuses their outreach to compatriots in Lithuania on increasing tension between Poles and Lithuanians.[83] Political organization seeks to combine the efforts of both groups under a single banner in the Electoral Action of Poles (EAP) party. Religious diplomacy does not appear to play a

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[83] Nerijus Maliukevicius, "Russian Soft Power and Non-Military Influence: The View from Lithuania," in *Tools of Destabilization*, ed. Mike Winnerstig (Stockholm, SE: FOI, 2014), 115-117.

large role in Russian cultural outreach to Lithuania, as both ethnic Lithuanians and Polish communities are predominantly Catholic.

A 2008 survey by *Russkii Mir* determined that the Russian language was declining in popularity among Lithuanian youth, with an increasing number choosing English, and indicating greater interest in Western culture over Russian.[84] The compatriots' policy thus extended its outreach to Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Poles in Lithuania, using their common knowledge of the Russian language as a unifying element to promote Russian culture and influence. These groups demonstrate manifestation of that influence by the likelihood their members view the legacy of Soviet history, and the current political system in Russia, in a positive light. Ethnic Lithuanians are more likely to remember the Soviet legacy in terms of occupation and oppression. NGO networks, as in Estonia and Latvia, play an important role providing a social network for these minority communities, but because of a lack of interest in Russian cultural centers, compatriots' organizations operate out of the Polish Cultural House in Vilnius. With the lack of dedicated physical structures supporting outreach to Russian minorities, online resources, such as rusorg.lt and rusmir.lt, provide organization and media distribution. In addition to providing an outlet for Russian communication, these forums and NGOs support the association of so-called "neo-innocents" clubs, reminiscent of the Soviet practice of encouraging Western dissidents to advocate for disarmament in their home countries and seek rapprochement on terms favorable to the USSR. The modern incarnation rallies around environmental causes, such as opposition to building nuclear

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[84] Ibid., 123-124.

infrastructure or shale gas exploitation that would undercut Kremlin interests in natural gas or petroleum exports, both to the Baltics and through the region to Western markets. The Format-A discussion club appears to be a non-partisan forum for discussion of ideas, analogous to TED Talks, but in practice fosters pro-Russian lectures to Lithuanian audiences about pending collapse and crisis in both the EU and NATO.[85]

While online forums enable organization of cultural entities, the primary concern for Lithuanian authorities is traditional media, including traditional news, pseudo-documentaries, and a Russian language press dominated by Kremlin-owned entities. These media propagate conspiracy theories around neo-fascism and decrying the tragedy of the decline and collapse of the USSR in the face of Western pressure. In line with the rest of the region, Kremlin-owned media and Russian produced programming is higher quality than domestic Russian-language broadcasts, exacerbated by the financial crisis of 2008 that reduced public funding for public media outlets and advertising revenue for private outlets. These channels provide Moscow with multiple avenues to communicate with communities isolated along linguistic lines. These communications efforts often support Russian objectives in Lithuania's political arena.[86]

Political organization exclusively among ethnic Russians is not significant due to the relatively small size of their population in Lithuania, and thus Russia has been unable to make strong links between their policies and these communities. The two Russian parties in Lithuania, Russian Alliance and Union of Russians, do not exercise any

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[85] Ibid., 123-129.

[86] Ibid., 129-136.

significant power in the Lithuanian government. In contrast, the EAP party enjoys largely

unified support from Lithuania's Polish minority. Its leadership effectively organized as a

political bloc within Lithuanian governing institutions, even joining the ruling coalition in

2012 after receiving almost 6 percent of the popular vote. Because it represents an ethnic

minority with its own ties to Russian culture and language, it provides an opportunity for

Kremlin exploitation. In 2012, the Russian Alliance party entered a cooperative

agreement with the EAP, and the party began to represent ethnic Russian priorities in its

rhetoric and priorities. The Lithuanian People's Party, an avowed pro-Russian party with

its own cooperative agreement with United Russia since 2009, also coordinates with the

EAP in electoral and legislative strategies. Neo-Eurasianist ideologue and ardent anti-

globalist Aleksandr Dugin articulated on Russian state media in 1997 that tension

between Polish and Lithuanian priorities "are an especially valuable asset and should be

used or, whenever possible, these tensions should be deepened."[87] Following this advice,

Lithuanian media published leaked state security documentation showing EAP

representatives visited Moscow just before the 2012 parliamentary elections and met with

the department head of the Presidential Directorate for Interregional Relations and

Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries. All three Baltic states have since declared that

department head, Modest Kolerov, *persona non grata* for interference in their respective

domestic political processes, including coordinating unattributed Kremlin media support

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[87] Dugin's rhetoric provides context when considering Putin's revanchist priorities and views of the West. Dugin's website, www.4pt.su espouses his "Fourth Political Theory," celebrating nationalist populism as distinct from conventional left versus right considerations and explicitly blames Western centrist policies and expanding liberalism for the decline of traditional Christian values and growing geopolitical strife.

for the Harmony Centre Party in Latvia and the Centre Party in Estonia. United Russia's

leader in 2012, Boris Gryzlov, hailed the results of the 2012 elections, stating that United

Russia's partners are now "part of the Government Coalition." EAP's membership in the

ruling coalition provided official opposition to adoption of the Euro currency in 2015,

consistent with Moscow's goals of discouraging Western integration.[88]

While Russian objectives in Lithuania follow lines similar as in Estonia and

Latvia, to ignite anti-Western sentiments and frame history according to Russian views,

their ways and means reflect a nuanced understanding of Lithuanian cultural and political

realities. Adaptation of their Compatriots' Policy and political support for minorities

external to Russian communities provide Russia inroads to Lithuanian society for pro-

Russian media to further segment communities and support Moscow's regional

destabilization and economic priorities.

<u>Persistent Themes and Target Audiences</u>

Analysis of the individual Baltic States provides a pattern of persistent themes

emanating from Russia. Understanding these themes and their context, and identifying

Russia's target audiences, will provide the fidelity required to answer questions regarding

options available for the US, NATO, and the Baltic States to respond.

The primary theme derived from Russian portrayals of history is that the Baltic

States originally invited Soviet occupation in 1940, and minimizing duplicity posed by

the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed by the USSR under Stalin and Nazi Germany.[89] This

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[88] Ibid., 115-122.

[89] AOWG, "Ambiguous Threats and External Influences: Phase 2," 31-32.

theme expands to celebrate the Red Army's role in defeating fascism during the Second World War and the absorption of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the USSR as Soviet Socialist Republics for the duration of the Cold War. Kremlin-aligned sources frame any modern opposition to Russian policy or suppression of Russian separatist movements as support for fascism. Russia targets compatriots' communities with this theme to provide an organizational nucleus, such as in response to Estonia's relocation of the Soviet-era war memorial from Tallinn's city center.

Complementing historical themes, Russia publicizes or distorts the theme of Baltic official persecution of compatriots' communities as evidence of fascist tendencies. Russia portrays Baltic education and integration initiatives among Russian communities as a violation of their basic human rights. The target audiences for this theme are not just internal to the Baltics, but to the wider European community, as Russia not only isolates the Baltics in public opinion, but also challenges the credibility of Western institutions to criticize Russian internal policies by making false equivalencies between Russian and Baltic practices.

Supporting its objective to reduce NATO's influence in the former Soviet sphere, Russia distorts NATO's aims in the Baltics by claiming the alliance only uses the Baltics as part of an aggressive military strategy. Ultimately, Russia aims to convince Baltic populations and their leaders that NATO is unable to protect the region in case of conflict, and that their long-term security is best secured through cooperation with Eurasian institutions. The economic corollary to NATO's military deficiency is the declining ability of the West to dominate the global economy as Russia leads the EEU in a multipolar world order.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The preceding research and analysis provides context for the conclusion that the

US, NATO, and the Baltic States have a variety of strategic options to respond to Russian

soft power incursions of propaganda, disinformation, and information warfare in the

Baltics. As stated in the original problem statement, the free Western societies operate at

a disadvantage in the information space, as Russian propagandists owe no commitment to

truth or consistency, and exercise a far greater control over their domestic information

environment than Western institutions. The best strategy to combat Russian propaganda

is not Western propaganda; instead, the US and its allies must contest Russian themes in

open source media according to Western values, and dedicated assimilation of minorities

in accordance with Western liberal values. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania must integrate

audiences targeted for influence into their countries of residence, legally, economically,

and socially, while respecting these communities' distinct culture and place in society.

The framework for these efforts exists in historical US strategy to counter Soviet

disinformation during the Cold War. The USIA, established under President Dwight

Eisenhower in 1953 and abolished in 1998 in a bipartisan decision between the

Republican-controlled Congress and Democratic President Bill Clinton in 1999, was a

strategic communications agency that included broadcast and public diplomacy means.

The agency provided strategic communications policy guidance to improve the image of

the US abroad and otherwise support US and allied interests. The USIA served as the

lead agency for the AMWG, commissioned under President Ronald Reagan, and

disbanded in 1992. The AMWG was an interagency forum that brought together stakeholders from across the executive branch charged to counter Soviet Active Measures during the last decade of the Cold War, such as Operation *Infektion* described in the first chapter. The guiding principles of the AMWG were prescient in the early 1980s, and bear consideration in light of Russian influence operations today.[90]

The recommendations below will address countering Russian disinformation and propaganda within the information space, development of professional standards for journalists and bloggers, and national policies in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to resolve outstanding issues that isolate audiences targeted for influence.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

<div align="center">Contesting the Information Space</div>

The US should revive the USIA to develop a comprehensive strategy analogous to Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 75, in which his administration unified efforts in a whole of government approach to end the Cold War on terms favorable to Western interests.[91]

The USIA should lead an international and interagency body under the purview of NATO, with authority to coordinate with the EU to gather information, analyze open source information threats to allied nations like the Baltic States, and publicize reports to generate media coverage and discussion of Russian disinformation and propaganda

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[90] Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda," 8.

[91] United States Government, "NSDD 75," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, January 17, 1983, accessed March 24, 2017, https://reaganlibrary.archives. gov/Archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDS/NSDD75.pdf.

efforts in the Baltics. It is important to note that disagreement over policy is not disinformation, and these policies should not provide cover to sanction responsible journalists or media outlets for simply expressing views or covering events that do not support allied or respective national interests.

Using the AMWG framework, this international and interagency body should include representatives from intelligence, counterintelligence, law enforcement, diplomacy, and the military. Additionally, this body should consider regional think tank and respected media representation where appropriate to add credibility and transparency to the process. Standards for publication must maintain a high standard for accuracy to preserve credibility, and only include disinformation objectives capable of debunking using unclassified information to avoid mission creep and squandering efforts on reports only released with redaction, and thus harming the perception of transparency. As a departure from the AMWG, this new cooperative body must include online and social media analysis to both identify threats and determine effectiveness of policies. Russian online troll factories combined with so-called transparency organizations such as WikiLeaks and other online "hacktivists" add a new dimension in outreach to isolated communities prone to conspiracies and exploitation.

Media Quality and Professional Standards

Due to the possible perception of the US interfering with free speech overseas, the US should rely on its NATO partners to work with the EU to encourage professional standards within the media that mitigate internal security concerns of member states.

One possible forum for a convention on media standards would be the Council of Europe, though Russia's membership in that body may dilute any agreements. Carefully

drafted to conform to official, thus sterile, Russian foreign and domestic policy, such standards may meet rhetorical standards for media conduct and provide opportunities to hold Russia accountability in an international setting when members discover convention violations. The convention should address mentorship for nations still in the nascent stages of regulating a free press, such as the Baltic States, and provide a credible forum with legal ties to the European Court of Human Rights to apply remedies if needed. The US should maintain an observer status through NATO to maintain at least tangential contact with processes, if not as an advocate of specific policies.

NATO should also work through the EU to provide support for robust public broadcasting in the Baltics, particularly in Russian language media. Russian productions are consistently higher quality than those of their Baltic counterparts; Estonia and Latvia in particular need credible, professional news and entertainment media as an alternative to Kremlin-owned broadcasts due to their large Russian minorities, especially as these communities increase their political involvement. The US should provide funding, and in cooperation with the EU, develop a Russian language media industry with high quality commercial products.[92]

Policies within the Baltic States

Policies within the Baltic States should focus on countering Russia's persistent themes and integrating isolated communities into their nations' societies. The immediate existential threat remains Russian aggression, and so the first priority for NATO to counter Russian influence is to provide a credible military deterrent to Russian aggression

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[92] Lucas and Pomeranzev, *Winning the Information War,* II-III.

and prevent Russia from attempting to seize eastern Latvia or Estonia under a similar pretext as Russia did in Crimea in 2014. RAND estimated that at least seven brigades, including three heavy brigades, with appropriate air and fire support, could provide adequate defense until NATO could reinforce.[93] This would counter the Russian theme that NATO cannot or would not satisfy mutual defense obligations and that the Baltics are simply pawns in Western aggression against Russia.

The historical themes linking the Baltic States to fascism require more holistic and long-term approaches. Estonia and Latvia must resolve issues around stateless residents to remove that topic from international discussion, and extend outreach efforts to integrate their Russian speaking population into society. This should occur alongside no-cost education exchange programs for children in Russian communities and public works projects to improve standards of living in under-served areas that demonstrate to residents of communities like Narva or Latgale their value to the nation at large. Baltic Universities should regularly conduct public policy and historical lectures in the Russian language to discuss how the region suffered from both Nazi and Soviet aggression to present both cultural views in a common forum.

Finally, the Baltic States should encourage exploration of Russia by their ethnic Russian minorities to provide first-hand knowledge of life in the Eurasian sphere, particularly in areas outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg where privation is more pronounced and standards of living are far lower than in the European sphere. These accounts, combined with increased economic and social opportunities in their home

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[93] Shlapak, *Reinforcing Deterrence On NATO's Eastern Flank*, 1-2.

countries should encourage a verdant information space without the need to resort to domestic propaganda campaigns.

Politically, the three countries should not accede to Russia interfering in their electoral processes. While an outright ban of specific media outlets would be counterproductive, enforcing campaign laws regarding media coverage and financial contributions should be completely transparent. Electoral administrators, law enforcement, and forensic accountants under the auspices of the EU should audit prominent political parties, whether national or municipal, to ensure that candidates maintain transparency about their financial support and political obligations and allegiances.

<u>Suggestions for Further Research</u>

This study only tangentially considered economic levers of influence, though thorough analysis of the EEU and Russian energy policy may provide insight into future Russian targets of influence. A future study could compare how the Soviet economy suffered while underwriting the economies behind the Iron Curtain, and compare the economic arrangement of the USSR with the current construct in the EEU.

While this study considered political influence, it was only in the context of how Russia exercised its information capabilities to support candidates. The current rise of nationalism, coupled with allegations of Russian electoral influence among Western democracies, could provide a useful frame to predict and mitigate nefarious influence by authoritarian regimes in the future.

Researchers with access to the region, either through virtual communication such as with an organization like YouGov or the Pew Research Center, could conduct a study

of the effectiveness of particular messages in ethnic Russian communities. The research may discover geographic differences between regions and enable targeted outreach depending on how residents view the legacy of the USSR or Western integration, providing details to support strategy and policy recommendations.

Lastly, the migrant crisis of refugees fleeing North Africa and the Middle East is a particularly difficult topic within the EU, as policy differences between member nations provide opportunities for Russia to exploit as it seeks to encourage fissures between liberal democracies. Russia is apparently pursuing a deliberate strategy in Syria to create incentives for migrants to flee, and then targeting audiences in Hungary, Poland, and the Scandinavian nations to exacerbate ethnic resentment and isolate these communities. This isolation is likely to increase the likelihood that these refugees would be involved in criminal or terrorist activity. Effectively communicating the rational of refugee allocations against countries with aging populations and demand for labor may undermine themes meant to isolate populations and provide imperatives for integration that support the EU common market concept.

GLOSSARY

Active Measures. Soviet-era term used to describe information, psychological, or political means conducted to advance Soviet foreign policy goals and extend influence throughout the world.

Active Measures Working Group. Interagency working group chartered under President Ronald Reagan, responsible for identifying, analyzing, and publicizing Soviet Active Measures at the end of the Cold War; disbanded in 1992.

Collective Security Treaty Organization. Military alliance among former Soviet republics, led by Russia, headquartered in Moscow, and intended to balance the NATO military alliance.

Commonwealth of Independent States. Political organization formed by members of the former USSR after the end of the Cold War in 1991; overseas the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Compatriots' Policy. Russian foreign policy construct for Russia to provide cultural services to the Russian diaspora; frequently used as a pretext to intervene in sovereign countries under the pretext of humanitarian relief.

Disinformation. False or misleading information deliberately disseminated to deceive or influence targeted audiences.

Eurasian Economic Union. Economic Union of countries in the northern Eurasian region, with a single market of approximately 180 million people and a GDP of $4 trillion as of 2016; intended to balance the European Union.

Federal Security Service. (Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti) Russian s main security service and successor to the Committee for State Security (KGB).

Finlandization (or Finlandisation). The policy of a smaller neighbor country suborning their foreign policy priorities to a larger, more powerful, neighbor in exchange for domestic autonomy.

Hybrid Warfare. Combination of traditional maneuver warfare, unconventional warfare, information warfare, and political subversion, intended to defeat an adversary force psychologically, with little or no conflict.

Information Warfare. The use of technical and influential means to influence an adversary to act against their own interests.

Molotov Ribbentrop Pact. Agreement signed on 23 August 1939 by Soviet and German foreign ministers, in which Nazi Germany and the USSR defining spheres of

influence for each of the two countries, including the Baltic States falling under the Soviet sphere.

Political Warfare. The use of political means, such as government infiltration or electoral influence to compel an adversary to act against their own interests.

Propaganda. Biased or misleading information intended to influence a target audience to take, or not take, a particular action.

Soft Power. A persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural influence to change behavior through attraction, distinct from overt diplomatic or military coercion.

Soviet Sphere or Former Soviet Sphere. Broad description that includes all of the former Soviet Socialist Republics and Eastern European nations behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War.

US Information Agency. Cold War era agency responsible for monitoring and influencing opinion abroad of the United States and its objectives.

Vilnius Group. Cultural and political affiliation between the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia with the objective of integrating into European and Atlantic institutions, such as the EU and NATO.

Visegrád Group. Cultural and political affiliation between the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, with the objective of integrating into European and Atlantic institutions, such as the EU and NATO.

Warsaw Pact. Collective security treaty between the USSR and seven Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe; abrogated when the USSR disintegrated in 1991.

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